



**Testimony of The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity  
Submitted to the Public Health Committee  
Monday, March 28, 2022 ~ 11:00 AM via Zoom**

Co-Chairs Senator Abrams and Representative Steinberg, Ranking Members Senator Hwang & Somers, Ranking Member Representative Petit, and other distinguished members of the Public Health Committee; we are submitting joint testimony written by Melvette Hill and Thomas Nuccio of the Connecticut General Assembly's Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity (CWCSEO). We are pleased to submit testimony **in support** of the following bill:

- S.B. No. 477 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PUBLIC HEALTH OF RESIDENTS OF THE STATE.

**Background and Purpose of S.B. 477**

From 2015 to 2019, over 559 people in Connecticut were victims of homicide. The vast majority of victims were from gun violence and many more survived life-altering gunshot wounds. Connecticut, like other states, has experienced a vast increase in violence in 2020, where the state has seen over 157 homicides and 96-gun homicides as of October 2021.<sup>1</sup> This violence is disproportionately concentrated in just a few cities, with Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven being hit the hardest. African Americans make up just over 12% of Connecticut's population but constitute over 65% of the state's gun homicide victims. The injuries and loss of life have generated an estimated \$430 million in measurable costs annually. The societal costs are over \$1.2 billion each year and, equally if not more important, is the chronic trauma and post traumatic stress disorder that children and their families live with as a result of community gun violence.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of these alarming statistics the Connecticut General Assembly enacted Public Act 21-35, which created the Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention Advisory Committee and designated the CWCSEO as its administrative staff. The Advisory Committee produced a final report submitted on December 30, 2021, which detailed the issue of gun violence in Connecticut and highlighted many policy recommendations on how to reduce the level of gun violence and community violence in our state.

This testimony specifically addresses section 7 of this bill that establishes a Commission on Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention which aligns with the key recommendation of the former Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention Advisory Committee.

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<sup>1</sup> CT Violent Death Reporting System, CT Department of Public Health as of 2/21/2022

<sup>2</sup> [12-30-2021-GVIPAC-Complete-Report-Submission.pdf \(ct.gov\)](https://www.ct.gov/cwcseo/documents/12-30-2021-GVIPAC-Complete-Report-Submission.pdf)



### **Areas of Support for S.B. 477**

The Commission supports the formation of the Commission on Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention to coordinate the funding and implementation of evidence-based, evidence-informed, community-centric gun programs, and strategies to reduce community gun violence in the state.

In fact, the advisory committee's central recommendation is to form a **Commission on Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention to coordinate the funding and implementation of evidence-based, evidence-informed, community-centric programs and strategies to reduce street-level gun violence in the state.** These community-based intervention programs have a highly successful track record across the country and have been validated through academic research. Even in cities that suffer from high rates of gun violence, less than 1% of the population is responsible for most of the shootings.<sup>3</sup>

Effective community-based programs narrowly focus on the small percentage of those at highest risk to shoot or be shot. The most effective way to curb community violence is to coordinate a community-based strategy through city-wide and state-wide infrastructure. The overarching component of intervention programs is frontline violence prevention which includes professionals whose job is to develop close relationships with individuals who are at high risk<sup>4</sup> and engage them in the process. The Advisory Committee sees the importance of these “credible messengers” and calls upon the Public Health Committee to consider their importance when crafting this legislation.

**Investing in community-based, community centered solutions focused on reducing gun violence are in our state's best interest.** Strategies that focus on reducing gun violence not only with violence intervention, but also prevention and aftercare, are paramount to healing our residents who are most affected by gun violence. Many states across the country have already taken steps by investing in the executive branch infrastructure to fund, implement, support, and oversee community-based violence prevention programs.<sup>5</sup> The establishment of a Commission on Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention could provide the **necessary coordination, understanding of gaps in funding, and comprehensive strategic planning to reduce gun violence in Connecticut.** Identification of organizations, which have an impact on the success of reducing gun violence in urban communities working with diverse populations, is critical to the success of this work. Additionally, addressing the high incarceration and recidivism rates can have a positive impact on children, families, and the communities at large.

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<sup>3</sup> [12-30-2021-GVIPAC-Complete-Report-Submission.pdf \(ct.gov\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [12-30-2021-GVIPAC-Complete-Report-Submission.pdf \(ct.gov\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [12-30-2021-GVIPAC-Complete-Report-Submission.pdf \(ct.gov\)](#)



Community engagement is another critical element for this work to be effective. Engaging those most impacted by gun violence and inviting them to actively participate with the Commission ensures that representatives from the community are part of the decision-making process. This Commission should also include community-based organizations and individuals involved in violence prevention work. Engaging the community proactively in the development of crime prevention strategies is central. Having mental health services readily available for survivors of homicide victims as well as mobile crisis units which are deployed when victims call 211, ensures that communities experiencing violence and trauma have sufficient advocates and resources.

Lastly, in section 7, subsection 9 the Commission is honored to serve as an appointing authority, and in accordance with subsection 12, is grateful for the opportunity to serve on this Commission.

#### **Areas of Improvement for S.B. 477**

Although we fully support section 7 of this bill, we believe that the executive director of the Commission on Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention should be staffed with a “Gun Violence Funding Coordinator” to assist this Commission with the powers and duties listed in subsection (i) of this bill. **We believe that the scope of the executive assistant position must assist the Commission with these critical tasks.**

The Commission supports this legislation, and emphasizes the areas mentioned to improve this bill.

CWCSEO, is a non-partisan agency within the legislative branch of government. We work to eliminate disparities by identifying opportunities, building connections, and promoting change. Most importantly, we serve the legislature and the people of the state by promoting best practices, and driving sound public policy via data driven research, recommendations, and a cross-cultural approach to policy innovation.

Thank you,

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